

CAUCASIA AND **CENTRAL** ASIA

the Caspian; thence it was to move to Tiflis and there organize a native Transcaucasian force for resistance to the Turkish-German troops.

To fulfill these orders, the "Dunsterforce"¹ obviously had to pass through the neutral territory of Iran and to be received in a friendly way in Tiflis. The British command had no compunction about transgressing on Iranian soil since that country's neutrality had previously been violated both by the Turks and the Russians. As Iran had been powerless to thwart the free roaming of Turkish and Russian troops in the territory of Tabriz and Urumia, she could reasonably be expected not to resist the passage of the "Dunsterforce."

The prospect of a friendly reception in Tiflis, however, was clouded by many uncertainties. In January, 1918, the political situation in Transcaucasia was in a state of flux. Neither the Transcaucasian Federation, nor its three member states had as yet declared their formal independence. Two things were, however, certain: first, Transcaucasia did not want to belong to Soviet Russia, second, it did not want to be overrun by Turkish armies. The Christian elements of Transcaucasia—especially the Armenians and to some degree the Georgians—were afraid of the Turkish advance, in view of the notoriously hostile Turkish attitude toward the Armenians in particular. Of the two dangers, Bolshevik and Turkish, the latter seemed more immediate as the Bolsheviks were at that time busy with their own affairs in Russia proper. Hence the enterprising Armenian politicians, both from Tiflis and Baku, decided to get in touch with the British and investigate the possibility of aid

from them. With such encouragement the British sent a staff officer, General Offley, to Tiflis to act as a liaison between them and the Transcaucasian nationalists.

When the "Dunsterforce,"¹ in pursuance of its instructions, arrived in Hamadan, in Iran, General Dunsterville met General Offley, who had just come back from Tiflis. His report did not augur well for the British expedition: according to Offley the Tiflis politicians were hesitant and rather pro-German. They considered a deal with the Germans as possibly a better safeguard against the Turks than reliance on British assistance. They seemed to be motivated by realistic